United Nations A/62/PV.88

General Assembly

Sixty-second session

Official Records

88th plenary meeting
Wednesday, 2 April 2008, 10 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Kerim ..... (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia)

The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Thematic debate entitled "Recognizing the achievements, addressing the challenges and getting back on track to achieve the MDGs by 2015"

Agenda item 116 (*continued*)

Follow-up to the outcome of the Millennium Summit

Statement by the President

The President: May I welcome participants to the second day of the General Assembly's thematic debate on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). I would like to begin by thanking all our panellists, special guests and the moderators. I would like in particular to thank the Deputy Secretary-General for her comprehensive summary of yesterday's debate.

The expertise and experience that we brought to bear on this important issue has enabled the Assembly to have — in the words of one of our moderators, Kandeh Yumkella, Director-General of the United Nations Industrial Development Organization, a frank, open and introspective dialogue. The panel discussions on poverty and hunger and education and health and the message from the President of Mali have reaffirmed our view that making progress on these targets will have a catalytic effect on all the Millennium Development Goals.

When I opened the debate yesterday, together with the Secretary-General, I set the context of our discussions. We know that our pace is too slow and that we need a decisive impulse to mobilize all our efforts and involve all our partners to achieve all the MDGs in all countries on time. It is clear from our debate yesterday that we have the solutions. The key issue is that we all have to deliver on our commitments, scale up our efforts and accelerate progress. Failure is not an option.

But neither can we descend into mutual accusations that only divert our attention from action and undermine our partnership. Mutual accountability is the only way forward. When aid is effectively aligned behind national Governments and predictable over the long term, rapid progress can be achieved. Leaders across every level of the development system now need to hold themselves to account, as Jayaseelan Naidoo, Chairman of the Development Bank of Southern Africa, has rightly noted. We need to urgently translate political commitments made at the highest level into results on the ground. We need more commitment and dedication.

The year 2008 is when our promises must be delivered on the ground in order to have a lasting impact on the lives of the poorest and most vulnerable. Yesterday, high expectations were expressed about the General Assembly's leadership role, including at the high-level meeting in September 2008, which should focus on delivering tangible outcomes. I therefore look forward to participants' interventions today and tomorrow to send a strong signal to the many forthcoming meetings on development to be held this year, including those of the G-8, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development and the

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Economic and Social Council, as well as the Accra Conference and the Doha Conference on Financing for Development.

It is clear that the General Assembly wants to see concrete results on poverty and hunger and education and health, as well as more investment in agriculture and infrastructure, particularly in Africa, to achieve the MDGs on time. But our efforts must not end in 2008. I therefore propose that each year until 2015, the General Assembly convene a thematic debate on the Millennium Development Goals to take stock of progress and to hold all partners to account for their promises.

As Prime Minister Vanhanen of Finland pointed out, development is the basis of our security and the means to achieve a more just society. All these elements are interlinked, and each represents one of the core values the United Nations was founded upon. A world with less poverty will be a safer one — a fairer and more secure place, one in which every person has the opportunity to fulfil their human potential. We should not lose sight of that goal.

Before proceeding further, I would like to draw the attention of members to some organizational matters pertaining to the conduct of the meeting. I turn first to the length of statements. In order to accommodate all the speakers inscribed on the list — and there are 117 currently inscribed — I urge speakers to adhere to the five-minute time limit for their statements, on the understanding that that would not preclude the distribution of more extensive texts. I appeal to speakers to cooperate in that respect.

Also, in order to assist speakers in managing their time, a light system has been installed at the speakers' rostrum that functions as follows. A green light will be activated at the start of a speaker's statement. An orange light will be activated 30 seconds before the end of the five minutes. And a red light will be activated when the five-minute limit has elapsed.

I now give the floor to Her Excellency The Honourable Joanne Massiah, Minister of State of Antigua and Barbuda.

Ms. Massiah (Antigua and Barbuda): I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

As we pass the midway point between the adoption of the Millennium Declaration and the target dates of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), it is important to note that developing countries in general have made substantial progress in achieving critical development targets. Yet, much work remains to be done if the Development Goals and their corresponding targets, as envisaged by the Declaration of world leaders in 2000, are to be met by 2015.

Much of this lagging behind in the expected progress towards the MDGs is the result of insufficient resources to tackle emerging, as well as long-standing, challenges to development. At the International Conference on Financing for Development, held in Monterrey in 2002, leaders from both developed and developing countries started to match development commitments with resources and action, generating a global agreement in which sustained reform by developing countries would be matched by direct support from the developed world in the form of aid, trade, debt relief and investment. That reinforced, and served as a reminder of, the shared responsibility of developed and developing countries in achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

Understanding our share of responsibility in achieving the MDGs, the Group of 77 and China acknowledges that a lot has been done to create enabling domestic environments for the achievement of the MDGs, and efforts are on the way to make even greater progress. Yet, we are being held back by a woeful failure to meet commitments.

Despite the progress made by developing countries, commitments to increase the provision of resources have not been fulfilled. There is a commitment to collaborate on international resource mobilization, but the international financial environment is still not transparent, stable or predictable. There is a commitment to collaborate on trade, but, despite improvements in the agricultural sector of developing countries, agricultural subsidies in developed countries still persist. There is a commitment to collaborate on increasing the coherence and sustainability of international systems, but the development efforts from the Bretton Woods institutions, the World Trade Organization (WTO) and other international financial institutions are incoherent and not concerted. There is a commitment to collaborate on financial and technical cooperation, but official development assistance (ODA) levels, as a percentage of gross national product (GNP), have

decreased, despite improved absorptive capacities in developing countries.

The Group wishes to place special emphasis on official development assistance to developing countries as indispensable in achieving the Millennium Development Goals. Despite promises of an additional $50 billion in ODA, declining numbers in 2007, along with heavy reliance on debt cancellation, which is funded with and detracts from ODA resources, are of serious concern. The forthcoming review of the Monterrey Conference on Financing for Development, to be held in Doha this year, will provide a valuable opportunity to evolve agreement on a comprehensive and effective approach to meet the resource requirements for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

Furthermore, if global poverty is to fall to the levels required to reach the MDGs by 2015, global GDP growth must remain at, or exceed, current annual levels of 3.5 per cent. In addition, to ensure that all developing countries make progress, global economic growth must reach the poorest. However, a global economic slowdown that originated in the developed world foreshadows a possible recession, falling commodity prices and fluctuations in the international financial markets that threaten to cause growth to stagnate and further marginalize the poorest. It is therefore also critical for international financial institutions to increase efforts to establish adequate financial strategies for developing countries that are vulnerable to economic crises, particularly the countries in Africa, least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States. That can prevent a reversal of progress towards the MDGs caused by global instability.

The task of achieving the MDGs by 2015 is a shared responsibility among all stakeholders. The Group of 77 and China continues to call for concrete focus on the lack of progress on MDG 8, regarding global partnership for development. So far, developing countries' policies and practices have been systematically scrutinized, while the shortcomings in the commitments of developed countries have been weakly, if at all, emphasized, and rarely quantified. Moreover, we are concerned at ongoing efforts to alter the MDG monitoring framework midway to 2015; more so as the proposed changes only cover MDGs 1 to 7. For the world to have any chance of transforming the current status quo of human underdevelopment, the monitoring framework must be consistent throughout the entire initiative and the burden of scrutiny must apply to all stakeholders. We therefore highlight the need to generate an intergovernmental agreement to develop a monitoring mechanism to track and promote the implementation of goals and commitments by all stakeholders; and we call for greater consistency in effectively monitoring the implementation of internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals.

Developed countries must be evaluated not only on their implementation of the Monterrey Consensus as the mechanism that ensures the resources necessary to achieve the Goals, but also on the progress made on MDG 8, for which, unfortunately, there are no clear benchmarks to monitor implementation. The Group therefore calls on the United Nations and its relevant bodies to contribute to the development of a comprehensive matrix of the commitments made under MDG 8 and specific benchmarks to facilitate the monitoring of its implementation.

Making MDG 8 work for the most vulnerable countries, and particularly for countries in Africa, is a priority concern of the Group. There seems to be no coordinated thinking or work on addressing how the potential of MDG 8 can be systematically harnessed, tracked or monitored to support development in general, and in Africa in particular. Therefore, convinced that the high-level meeting on Africa's development needs "will constitute a significant event that will review the implementation of all commitments made to and by Africa in order to comprehensively address the special development needs of the continent" (*resolution 62/242, sixth preambular paragraph*), the Group commends the holding of that important meeting, which is to take place in September of this year prior to the debate of the General Assembly's sixty-third session.

Monitoring progress on the MDGs without concrete and comprehensive progress on commitments, without consistent monitoring throughout the entire initiative and without clear benchmarks for MDG 8 is denying the essential shared responsibility among all stakeholders for the achievement of the Goals. The Group hopes that out of this discussion in the General Assembly will come renewed and invigorated efforts to close the implementation gap left by unfulfilled commitments.

The President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Žiga Turk, Minister for Growth of Slovenia.

Mr. Turk (Slovenia): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU). The candidate countries Turkey, Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the countries of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia, as well as Ukraine, Moldova, Armenia and Georgia align themselves with this statement.

We have crossed the midpoint between the adoption of the Millennium Development Goals and the 2015 target date. The data available indicate that results have been uneven. The EU has expressed its full commitment and dedication to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) on several occasions. The European Council has adopted important declarations and decisions to that effect. The reduction of poverty in the developing countries is the core overarching objective of EU development policy. The European Consensus on Development also emphasizes the EU commitment to respect human rights, fundamental freedoms, peace, democracy, gender equality, the rule of law, solidarity and justice, and pays special attention to the needs of Africa and the least developed countries. The EU shall address development efforts more systematically also in situations of fragility and pay more attention to the "aid orphan" countries.

The EU member States and the European Commission have made efforts to better align their development cooperation policies and practices with the overall objective of poverty eradication and the achievement of the MDGs. Again in 2005, the EU committed itself to scaling up EU aid, collectively contributing 0.56 per cent gross national income (GNI) to official development assistance by 2010 and reaching the target of 0.7 per cent GNI by 2015. The EU is currently providing 57 per cent of global official development assistance. We will continue to make efforts to meet and exceed our timetables, and we invite other countries to follow suit.

The EU strongly believes that progress towards the MDGs is not just about increasing the volume of official development assistance. It is also about improving aid effectiveness. The EU believes that it is particularly important to ensure extensive progress on four key aspects of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, namely, division of labour among donors, predictability of aid, enhanced use of country systems and mutual accountability for development results.

However, foreign aid alone, though important, cannot deliver the MDGs. Foreign aid can only be a complement to national efforts. In that regard, more efforts are needed: national strategies should better reflect the MDGs, and the linkage between sound poverty reduction strategies and budget allocations should be strengthened. In order to achieve the MDGs, each country should take firm ownership of and responsibility for its development agenda, tailor the global MDG targets within its specific context into national targets and policies and translate these into concrete programmes and budgetary allocations.

We should also not forget that all eight MDGs are closely interlinked and that development strategies rarely target just one objective. That underlines the necessity of promoting a comprehensive approach towards sustainable development, including pro-poor economic growth and progress in democratic governance.

In the Millennium Declaration of 2000, world leaders committed themselves to sparing no efforts to halve, by 2015, the proportion of the people who suffer from poverty and hunger. Progress towards meeting that Goal has been uneven: at the global level, the proportion of people living in extreme poverty fell from 28 per cent in 1990 to 19 per cent in 2005, but progress has been less pronounced in Southern Asia and, in particular, sub-Saharan Africa. Efforts to reduce the poverty should be accelerated in those regions since, with population increases, many more millions of people need to be taken out of poverty.

Likewise, malnourishment should be vigorously addressed. Climate change and the recent increase in food prices present additional challenges in the efforts to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger.

The EU fully shares the broad definition of poverty encompassing various dimensions besides income, such as access to health, social services and education, gender equality, social inclusion, powerlessness and lack of voice or representation. We are aware that even in developed countries, where living conditions have been improved by economic growth, pockets of poverty and social exclusion persist,

calling for renewed efforts targeted at specific population groups.

The achievement of poverty eradication depends on the existence of integrated and mutually reinforcing social, economic and environmental national strategies and plans to achieve sustainable development with a particular focus on a pro-poor growth perspective, the creation of productive employment and decent work and the adoption of social inclusion policies. Also, in many poor countries, development of the agriculture sector should be at the centre of poverty reduction strategies, given the evidence on the sector's ability to reduce poverty and hunger. As stated in the 2005 European Consensus on Development, combating poverty will only be successful if equal importance is given to investing in people, protecting natural resources, securing rural livelihoods and investing in wealth creation.

Given the particular vulnerability of women and girls to poverty and the fact that they make up the majority of the world's poor, efforts towards creating an environment conducive to the effective integration and active participation of women in development are, therefore, imperative. We underline that comprehensive gender-sensitive policies allowing and providing for the full and equal participation of women in policy- and decision-making are needed to address the feminization of poverty and enhance their contribution to economic and social development. In order to be effective, such strategies need to be implemented through, inter alia, gender-sensitive budgeting.

Learning and education should be at the heart of the development agendas. MDG 2 aims at ensuring that children everywhere — boys and girls — will be able to complete good quality primary schooling. MDG 3 targets the elimination of gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and at all levels by 2015. While there is encouraging news on achieving universal primary education, the gender parity goal set for 2005 has not yet been achieved.

The European Union is committed to accelerating progress towards the education MDGs as a policy priority, in particular with regard to access to primary education. At the international level, the EU supports actively the Dakar Framework for Action: Education for All, and its Fast-Track Initiative, in partnership with other bilateral donors for education, as well as UNESCO, UNICEF and the World Bank. EU priorities in education are quality primary education, vocational training and addressing inequalities within holistic national sector plans. Particular attention is devoted to promoting girls' education, children with special needs, safety at school and education in fragile States.

The Millennium Declaration places health squarely at the centre of the international development agenda and champions it as a key driver of economic progress. The challenges are many: strengthening health systems is critical, as is expanding the integrated delivery and access to health services, addressing the pressing shortfall in skilled health professionals and linking access to health care with building new hospitals, good roads and reliable water supplies.

Much attention should also be given to health in fragile States and to making aid more effective and equitable. New donors and aid channels in the health sector have contributed to a sharp increase in aid for some priority diseases, but this also requires support to health systems overall, harmonization among donors and stronger alignment around national policies and plans.

In achieving MDGs 4 and 5 — reducing child mortality and improving maternal health — improvement in health of pregnant women and new mothers plays an important role in further reducing child mortality and improving maternal health. Skilled and responsive care during pregnancy, at birth and immediately afterwards all contribute to lower maternal mortality and, consequently, to reducing child mortality. Immunization of children has also proved to significantly reduce child mortality.

In 2000, world leaders reaffirmed their commitment to reduce the maternal mortality rate by 75 per cent between 1990 and 2015. That goal was followed in 2006 by the addition of a target for universal access to reproductive health. Despite those commitments, complications of pregnancy and childbirth are still the leading cause of death among women in developing countries. No region thus far has achieved sufficient annual declines to reach the MDG 5 target. Much more needs to be done. This issue has to be prioritized in budgets and in endeavours to overcome the lack of political will. Reaching this MDG is crucial for achieving the other MDGs.

Progress in combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases — MDG 6 — has been facilitated by a substantive increase in resources provided by

international donors. The European Union would like to draw attention to the fact that HIV/AIDS remains a global scourge that requires a response at all levels through treatment, prevention, care and support in order to reach the target of universal access, in particular to antiretroviral therapy.

The EU is promoting comprehensive maternal health programmes and developing the pool of skilled birth attendants. The rates of maternal mortality or the number of skilled attendants at birth are useful indicators for assessing the functioning of health systems and our progress going forward. We will also continue to place special emphasis on access of young people in developing countries, the poorest in particular, to improved health.

The EU is also fully committed to supporting international action to address the shortage of health workers and the crisis in human resources for health in developing countries. The Commission and EU member States are developing a coordinated response through country, regional and global action.

Both health and education are integral parts of the tenth European Development Fund for the period of 2008-2013. Part of EU aid for health in developing countries is channelled through international organizations and global initiatives. The importance of progress in the areas of health and education is evident, both in their own right but also in creating an enabling environment for the empowerment of women and in making progress in the fight against poverty.

For several decades the development assistance community has worked with people and Governments of developing countries to help improve their living conditions. Progress, though often unrecognized, has been remarkable. In the past 30 years alone, life expectancy increased by more than 20 years. Infant mortality rates have dropped by half. Primary school enrolment has doubled. Developing countries have achieved remarkable, albeit uneven, improvements in the living standards of their people. The results are highly encouraging. They demonstrate that poverty can be overcome. But the battle is far from over.

The year 2008 is a crucial year to make progress in achieving the Millennium Development Goals. Their achievement is still possible in most countries, but only if concerted and well-targeted actions in support of all MDGs are increased immediately and sustained until 2015. That requires a shared global strategy that fosters inclusive sustained growth, solid context-sensitive national poverty strategies, sound governance, gender equality and empowerment of women. It also requires increased public and private investment, enhanced productive capacity and the creation of decent work, so that all development partners — Governments, international organizations, non-governmental organizations and the private sector — can join forces in getting the MDGs back on the track to achievement.

To accelerate progress, it is also necessary to focus on sharing best practices and scaling up of models that have proven effective. As the European Union, we intend to fully play our part and will discuss how we can best contribute to efforts to put the MDGs back on track at the May General Affairs and External Relations Council and the June EU Council.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Bangladesh.

Mr. Chowdhury (Bangladesh): Mr. President, I would like to begin by applauding your leadership in getting us focused on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). You do so at a critical time. This is just the impetus required to bring our aims to fruition.

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon deserves the highest praise for continuing to highlight the main contemporary issues: development, climate change, reforms of the world body.

I speak on behalf of the least developed countries (LDCs). The group aligns itself with the statement earlier by Antigua and Barbuda on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

Within the space of our lifetime, we have witnessed great progress. There is also a flip side of the coin. It is an axiomatic truth that one quarter of the world's population live on less than a dollar a day. Although a smaller percentage of humanity survives below the poverty line, the absolute number of the poor continues to grow. When many parts of the world are undergoing economic miracles, the LDCs continue to face the structural impediments to development that have been their bane.

Unprecedented hikes in food prices disproportionately affect the poor. They have risen by 40 per cent in 2007, and the poorest households spend over 70 per cent of their income on food items. Counter-cyclical measures by development partners

have been largely absent. Global food aid has declined to 0.4 per cent of production. Food-surplus countries must come forward to ease the supply-side constraints. A massive, united global action is called for. Only then can hunger and malnutrition be prevented. Only then shall we be able to achieve the core objectives of MDG 1.

Climate change and global warming are new challenges. They constitute our current nemesis. LDCs and small island developing States, due to their resource constraints and geography, are particularly vulnerable. The threats to low-lying coastal areas are obvious. The Food and Agricultural Organization and the International Fund for Agricultural Development have warned that climate change will put an extra 50 million people at risk of hunger by 2020.

The good news is that the world is responding to the wake-up call. We worked hard at Bali. However, the document was weak. It lacked a firm commitment to emission cuts. The sacrosanct principle of "common but differentiated responsibility" suffered a setback. I am pleased that Bangladesh was active as Chair of the LDCs. Our combined efforts led to the establishment of the Adaptation Fund Board, which, we hope, will facilitate equitable allocation for the purpose, and technology transfers.

If an agreement has to be reached by 2009, the discourse must be depoliticized. Developed countries must make unilateral, meaningful and unconditional commitments to reducing greenhouse gas emissions. The post-2012 agreement must recognize the special and compelling needs of vulnerable countries, such as the least developed countries. We would strongly urge the setting up of a technology transfer board to assist them.

Africa continues to be relentlessly subjected to the scourges of HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis. The lack of financial resources and trained health workers remains a key constraint to achieving their related Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The unpredictability of external resources renders the scaling-up of health-care services difficult. Fulfilment of MDG 8 is a categorical imperative.

For many countries, the targets of universal primary education and gender parity remain huge challenges. Seventy-two million primary age children remain out of school; 58 of the 86 countries that have not reached universal primary education will not achieve it by 2015. It is estimated that $10 billion will be required for it. That amount will be hard to come by.

However, the focus on least developed countries is starting to pay off, albeit slowly, even painfully, but surely. Reform measures to promote good governance, democracy, human rights and transparency are in place. Development is possible only against such a matrix. Ideas such as micro-credit and non-formal education are empowering women and children. Many have decentralized administration and strengthened local Government.

My own country, Bangladesh, is a case in point, yet, sadly, the least developed countries remain at the bottom of the pyramid. Promises of external resources remain elusive. Market access remains blocked. Where it is given, supply-side constraints dilute it. So, to move from rhetoric to action, we suggest five points.

First, developed countries must fulfil the official development assistance commitment of 0.2 per cent of gross national income for least developed countries by 2010. Secondly, all the external debts of least developed countries must be cancelled forthwith without discrimination or conditionalities. Thirdly, developed countries and developing ones in a position to do so must provide quota-free and duty-free access to all the products of all the least developed countries. Fourthly, preferential and more favourable treatment for service providers of the least developed countries must be accorded, particularly on the movement of natural persons under Mode IV of the General Agreement on Trade in Services. Finally, there must be a new international financial structure allowing the least developed countries to borrow against their own reserves.

We have only one world to live in, but our own actions put it at risk. We must learn to protect it in every possible way. We must recognize that the alleviation of the pains of some is the responsibility of all. That awareness sets our times apart from others in history. Is that too tall an order? We do not think so. After all, has it not been aptly said that humankind's reach should exceed its grasp? What else are the heavens for?

The President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Ranko Škrbić, Minister of Health of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Mr. Škrbić (Bosnia and Herzegovina): Having the opportunity to address this body on behalf of my entity is a great honour.

Systematic assessment of the progress and success of planned objectives, based on evidence, is an essential element of all programmes and activities directed at health promotion and disease prevention among vulnerable and underserved populations.

A multiple indicator cluster survey conducted in 2000 and 2006 by the Republika Srpska's Ministry of Health and Social Welfare; the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina's Public Health Institute and Agencies for Statistics, supported by UNICEF; and the British Government's Department for International Development was based in large part on the need to monitor progress towards goals and targets emanating from recent international agreements — the Millennium Declaration, adopted by all 191 United Nations Member States in September 2000, and the Plan of Action of "A world fit for children", adopted by 189 Member States at the United Nations special session on children in May 2002. Both of those commitments build upon promises made by the international community at the 1990 World Summit for Children. In signing those international agreements, Governments committed themselves to improving conditions for their children and to monitoring progress towards that end. UNICEF was assigned a supporting role in that task.

The 2006 multiple indicator cluster survey had as its primary objectives, first, to provide up-to-date information for assessing the situation of children and women in Bosnia and Herzegovina; secondly, to furnish data needed for monitoring progress towards objectives established by the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the goals of "A world fit for children" as a basis for future action; and thirdly, to contribute to the improvement of data collection and monitoring systems in Bosnia and Herzegovina and to strengthen technical expertise in the design, implementation and analysis of such systems.

The survey provided 90 indicators related to nutrition, child health, the environment, reproductive health, child development, education, child protection, HIV/AIDS, sexual behaviour, orphans and vulnerable children.

Let me provide some interesting figures. The prevalence of children under the age of 5 who are underweight is just 0.4 per cent in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the coverage for measles vaccine is 75 per cent. Cooking with solid fuels — biomass or coal — leads to high levels of indoor pollution and is a major cause of ill health in the world, particularly among children under 5, in the form of acute respiratory illness. Overall, 48.7 per cent of all households in Bosnia and Herzegovina use solid fuels. Nearly 99 per cent of the population has access to safe drinking water, and 93 per cent is living in households with safe sewage. The prevalence of households in poor areas is 15.8 per cent. The current use of contraception was reported by 35.7 per cent of women currently married or in a union. Doctor-, nurse- or midwife-assisted deliveries accounted for nearly 100 per cent of the births that occurred in the year prior to the survey.

With respect to education, nearly 99 per cent of children of primary school age are attending primary school. All children who enter the first grade of primary school reach grade five. The prevalence of primary school completion is 86.6 per cent. The ratio of girls to boys attending primary and secondary education shows that gender parity for primary and secondary school is close to 1. The vast majority of the adult population — 99.6 per cent — is literate.

Approximately 34 per cent of young women in Bosnia and Herzegovina know all three of the main ways to prevent HIV/AIDS transmission. Condoms are used by 71 per cent of women while having sexual intercourse with a non-regular partner.

One of the overarching goals of the MDGs and "A world fit for children" is to reduce infant mortality. The rate of infant mortality and the rate of stillbirths in Bosnia and Herzegovina have shown a declining trend in recent years. In 1996, the infant mortality rate was 14.6 per 1,000, and in 2005 it was 3.4 per 1,000. In 1996, the stillbirth rate was 12.4 per 1,000 and in 2005 it was just 3.4 per 1,000. Despite the fact that those stillbirth rate figures were actually derived on the basis of an estimated size of the population, and that those rates may be higher by several units per 1,000 if the size of the population is overestimated, the declining trend is still significant and indicates a very significant improvement.

Our country has achieved significant progress in the domain of stewardship thanks to the efforts that have been invested in producing and implementing

policies, health-care development strategies and normative legal regulations. The recently appointed ministerial conference on health in Bosnia and Herzegovina, consisting of the Ministries of Health of Republika Srpska, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Brcko district, and the Ministry of Civil Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina, is a positive example of main governmental involvement in the multi-party effort to stride forward in the coordination of health strategy planning and implementing activities in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The notably unfavourable demographic trend — the constant diminution of national growth rate — will have significant consequences with regard to the structure and volume of labour in the future. It also affects the health of the population in terms of the epidemiological transition associated with population ageing and contributes to an increased incidence and prevalence of malignant and chronic degenerative illnesses. This trend requires the preparedness of the health system to respond to the changing health of the population. It is also to be expected that there will be an increasing number of persons living with HIV/AIDS and multi-resistant tuberculosis, which will increase pressure on public health functions.

Development of democracy and an emphasis on the individual rights of community members, which, in terms of health care, can be interpreted as a better opportunity for a service user to choose, will bring about both opportunities and challenges. The opportunities imply a more active involvement of community members in decision-making in health, which at the same time requires a better responsiveness of the health system, and this, in turn, implies the provision of higher-quality health services. Changes in the law governing health services and social services will enhance the participation and contribution of local communities' governing bodies in the allocation of resources and the initiation of services at their own level.

Legal and regulatory changes in the European Union require a full readiness to swiftly respond to ecological and public health challenges, which calls for a state of preparedness requiring large investments. As a result of sociocultural changes, the public is slightly better informed and places higher demands on the health system. However, these changes have also undermined the structure of the family and led to an increased frequency of various forms of risky behaviour, such as unhealthy food, reduced physical activity, diverse forms of addiction and so on. Sociocultural changes are also the major cause of unfavourable demographic trends. Low fertility rates in the population is a situation that no developed society has managed to escape.

These factors exert pressure on the institutions of marriage and family, as do ideas of personal freedom, the consumer mentality, hedonism and non-traditional lifestyles. Like all contemporary societies, Bosnia and Herzegovina faces many structural challenges, including unemployment, housing issues and day care for children. Yet, although we live in a contemporary society, how is it possible that the number of newborns is so low when studies show that only 9.4 per cent of the women of reproductive age who are either married or living with a partner use any of the modern methods of contraception? Is it possible that the predominant method of family planning is abortion? The concept of freedom of the individual is essentially well intentioned but every one of us should start thinking about Jeremy Bentham's question — to what extent does my freedom limit the freedom of another?

The monitoring of population development in Bosnia and Herzegovina is one of the starting points for designing quality strategic plans for health, education and social welfare. A highly overdue census will constitute a starting point for comprehensive analyses of demographic indicators and for laying quality foundations for a population policy.

Some consider that the major reduction in the number of children being born in the regions of South-Eastern Europe offers an opportunity to provide better prospects for young people in the coming years. The cost of investing in the young generation is not directly proportional to the number of young people, and a sharp decline in the number of newborns does not justify inadequate investment in health, education and other areas that are vitally important to the development of young people and therefore to society.

The President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Majlinda Bregu, Minister of European Integration of Albania.

Mrs. Bregu (Albania): On behalf of the Government of the Republic of Albania, I am very pleased to have the opportunity to brief this august body on the progress made in our accomplishment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and on

the challenges that remain. I am confident that this event will be a useful learning experience for us all. I would like to extend our thanks to the President of the General Assembly for convening this meeting and for bringing about this exchange of views and experiences.

Albania fully aligns itself with the statement made by the distinguished representative of Slovenia on behalf of the European Union. On behalf of my country, I would like to make some further additional remarks. They will comply with the time limits, and a longer version of this statement will be circulated to all delegations.

The achievement of the MDGs, led by the National Strategy for Development and Integration, together with the National Plan for the implementation of the Stabilization and Association Agreement with the European Union, is our main objective.

The achievement of the MDGs remains the focus of my country's development agenda. We believe that development is a priority and an objective in and of itself. We also highly appreciate the importance of partnership in development. Developed and developing countries face the common and urgent responsibility to transform this partnership into a success story. Thus I am happy to state that Albania is currently an active and credible partner in global cooperation in this area.

Albania is undertaking a unique exercise in terms of making use of the MDGs, not only as a framework but also as a tool for development. We have adapted the global MDGs to our own domestic requirements, taking into consideration not only the local needs but also regional perspectives. Albania is probably the only country where the MDGs have been used to promote local development through regional development strategies, while improved governance, set as Albania's ninth goal, is being considered not only as a goal in itself but also as a major precondition for the achievement of all the other MDGs and for European Union integration.

The main purpose of our subnational reports was to explore and demonstrate how the MDGs could be used to build support for momentum from the bottom up, to assess local poverty challenges and to serve as an engine for comprehensive local development. Albania has succeeded in including the adapted MDGs in the National Strategy for Development and Integration, our main strategic document.

During 2007, the Albanian economy displayed a positive trend towards economic growth, which is forecasted to be at 6 per cent, macroeconomic stability and deepening of structural reforms oriented towards a more efficient economy. With regard to the fight against poverty, economic growth remains the key instrument for improving the living conditions of the population and therefore for the elimination of poverty. Economic indicators related to macroeconomic policies, assessments and predictions suggest that the rate of economic growth for 2009 to 2011 will be 6 per cent, rising to 6.5 per cent in 2009 and 7 per cent in the two following years. The rate of inflation for this period is expected to stay at or under the targeted level of 3 per cent.

With respect to education, consistent with the MDGs, the National Strategy for Development and Integration targets an adult literacy rate of 100 per cent, a rate of completion of 9 years education of 100 per cent, a rate of completion of higher education of 90 per cent, and an impressive increase in the average number of years of schooling from 9 to 13.5 years.

Public expenditures on education in terms of gross domestic product (GDP) declined from 3.75 per cent in 1995 to 3.1 per cent in 2004, but today they are up again at 3.6 per cent. This figure is still very low by comparison with the countries of the European Union, where it is 4.9 per cent, or with the West Balkan countries, where it is a little over 4 per cent. But the budget for our education system, which in 2004 represented only 2.4 per cent of GDP, in 2008 will be 4 per cent of GDP, thus even meeting the target set for 2009.

Different programmes have been introduced in the education system in Albania, such as e-school programmes that will connect public primary and high schools to the Internet and equip them with networked computer labs.

Investments in higher education have also increased. Through the complete liberalization of universities, the introduction of new branches and the opening of new universities, the number of students has doubled over the span of two years. Albania is reported to have 100,000 students attending public and private universities, as compared to 52,000 in 2004. In addition, a Fund for Excellency was established, and several other projects important for the modernization of our education system are supported. Our main goal

is that, by the end of 2009, the education budget would represent 5 per cent of gross domestic product, double the 2005 figure.

In the health sector, the main goal is to improve the quality of and accessibility to health services through achieving the objectives in improving the quality and equity of access to essential health-care services and strengthening sector stewardship and measures to ensure fiscal sustainability. In line with the MDGs, the National Strategy for Development and Integration sets a challenging target: a reduction in maternal mortality of 10 per 100,000 and 10 per 100,000 in child mortality by 2015. To achieve those objectives, priority is given to reforms in the health sector, particularly in public health measures and preventive care, and to the amelioration of access to and quality of the health financing system.

Albania's 2008 budget defines an increase of 60 per cent in investments in the health-care system, and we will conduct a policy of salary increases towards doubling nurses' salaries and a significant increase for physicians. In addition, reconstruction of some 13 clinics and hospitals in various districts is expected for 2008, along with construction of five new health-care centres. Eighteen per cent of the budget will be used for their equipment.

The practical implementation of a new national action plan on the MDGs, combined with innovative financing mechanisms, shows that their fulfilment represents a great opportunity for the Albanian people to ensure stable development and better governance. Although Albania is advanced in terms of using the MDGs as an effective means to promote human development, a number of challenges remain to be addressed, including the following.

First, the implementation of regional development strategies requires major efforts from local government, but also from the central Government, civil society and the donor community. Transferring more resources and increasing the capacities of local government in line with the decentralization reforms of the Government of Albania is very important. In addition, linking the MDGs regional development strategies with an integrated planning system seems to be crucial for increasing MDGs financing.

Secondly, efforts have been made to further integrate the MDGs with the EU social inclusion approach. However, more efforts are needed to tailor the MDGs to take into consideration the Albanian EU integration perspective in terms of social inclusion.

Thirdly, efforts to monitor and report on progress towards the achievement of the MDGs should be made at several levels. First, at the domestic level, local and central government should track the progress towards MDG achievement, and we are aware of that. Monitoring and reporting on MDGs would increase political accountability and reduce speculations in the political "market". The development of a good statistical base is a key factor for MDG monitoring.

Let me conclude by underlining some factors of importance. We must not forget that all the MDGs are highly interlinked. It is crucial for Governments, in their efforts to succeed in achieving the MDGs, to come up with well-balanced and integrated development strategies. We embrace the opinion that the right allocation and use of national development resources, coordinated international aid and promotion of the process of sharing best practices in the field are key factors for achieving the MDGs.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Chhay Than, Minister of Planning of Cambodia.

Mr. Than (Cambodia): Today, it is my great pleasure and honour to attend the General Assembly's thematic debate on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and to make a statement on behalf of the Royal Government of Cambodia.

During the last decade, with the strengthening of peace, stability, national unification, democracy and respect for human rights, our gross domestic product (GDP) growth was an average of 10.6 per cent between 2003 and 2006 and 10.1 per cent in 2007. Cambodia doubled its per capita GDP to $586 in 2007. We are aware that the very narrow base of economic growth in Cambodia, driven mainly by certain urban sectors, is the main cause of increasing inequality between urban and rural areas.

To implement the Rome Declaration on Harmonization, the Royal Government of Cambodia has decided to prepare a single national strategic development plan for 2006 to 2010, which will serve as a framework for aligning all activities supported by official development assistance. The Royal Government stands strongly committed to achieving

the Cambodian Millennium Development Goals by adopting their goals and targets as the key pillars of Cambodia's national development policy and strategy.

Cambodia's present performance in relation to the Cambodian MDGs is mixed and uneven. There have been significant reductions in poverty rates — 4.6 per cent in urban areas, especially in the Phnom Penh municipality, and 20.5 per cent in more accessible rural areas. Primary education has expanded to more children. There has been a significant reduction in mortality rates for both infants and children under five years of age to 66 and 83 per 1,000 live births, respectively — but those rates are still very high. Rates of immunization against major childhood diseases and of breastfeeding have improved, and gender disparity in most areas has been reduced, especially in primary education. Adult literacy and wage employment in agriculture and industry have improved. There has been a reduction of communicable diseases, especially in the adult prevalence rate of HIV/AIDS, which has decreased to 0.60 per cent, and urban access to safe water and rural access to better sanitation have improved.

In parallel with those achievements, there are still many shortcomings and challenges that Cambodia must overcome to realize the agreed goals and targets.

First, the country's high rural poverty rate of 39 per cent and its rural economy and living standards are still worrying challenges, along with the weakness of the economic infrastructure.

Secondly, there is limited progress in achieving the goals of universal nine-year basic education, particularly beyond primary education. The lack of skilled workers is already a severe constraint to accelerating growth in both rural and urban areas.

Thirdly, there is limited access to quality health services, especially in the area of women's and maternal health. Information from the 2005 Cambodia Demographic and Health Survey showed a very high maternal mortality ratio of 472 per 100,000 live births.

The Royal Government of Cambodia recognizes that those achievements can be made because of generous contributions from all of Cambodia's cooperation partners. They also reflect the gradual improvement in the efficiency and effectiveness of the utilization of the various kinds of cooperation financing that Cambodia has received from its external cooperation partners. On this rare and auspicious occasion, on behalf of the Royal Government and the people of Cambodia, I would like to express our heartfelt gratitude to all of our development partners for their invaluable and noble contribution to poverty reduction and development in Cambodia.

Cambodia's progress towards achieving the Cambodian MDGs is constrained by a chronic shortage of investment to meet its priority requirements. Cambodia's national MDG strategy must be complemented by financial, technical and other support from its development partners and the global community. A collective effort is the key to achieving the Cambodian MDGs and ensuring sustainable growth and stability in Cambodia. In closing, let me thank the Assembly for all its patience and attention.

The President: I give the floor to His Excellency The Honourable Denis Lowe, Minister of Social Care, Constituency Empowerment and Urban Development of Barbados.

Mr. Lowe (Barbados): I am pleased to be delivering this statement on behalf of my country, Barbados. We align ourselves with the statement made earlier by the Minister of State of Antigua and Barbuda on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. However, I would like to make this complementary statement to provide information on what has been undertaken by Barbados at the national level.

I join with fellow representatives in congratulating you, Sir, on your efficient leadership of the General Assembly. The Barbados delegation also commends you for the timeliness in the hosting of this thematic debate, which is being convened against the backdrop of high energy costs, the ravaging effects of climate change, and food insecurity. Those emerging challenges are threatening to derail what progress has been made by some countries in attaining the development targets of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and are exacerbating the difficulties already faced by those who are struggling to do so.

In January 2008, Barbadians elected a new Government to manage their affairs. As a representative of that new Government, I want to assure this body of our continued commitment to Barbados' full achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). As has been reported from time to time in similar forums, Barbados has exhibited a relatively good track record regarding the

achievement of many of the Millennium Development Goals and, as a consequence, we are in a position to pursue an MDG-plus strategy in some areas. Permit me to share an overview of some of the achievements and challenges faced in pursuing and maintaining the effort. Let us first look at the question of poverty.

Barbados continues to believe that no goal is more critical to the achievement of global development than the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger. Fortunately, extreme poverty and hunger do not exist in Barbados. Nevertheless, we are aware that there are pockets of poverty present, especially within the urban corridor, that must engage our attention. Over time, we have implemented a number of policies and programmes and established a number of institutions to assist us in doing so.

Indicators such as reduced welfare rolls, reduced unemployment and an enhanced culture of entrepreneurship suggest that those policies and programmes have brought some measure of success. However, there is a need for a full evaluation of their impact, and that will shortly be undertaken through the planned country poverty assessment, which will commence in approximately two months. In another 18 months, we will also be publishing our country's first national human development report, which will provide some data on the attainment of some of the targets linked to the Millennium Development Goals.

My Government is conscious of the fact that the pace of poverty eradication needs to be increased. To that end, we are embarking on a programme of constituency empowerment, which will involve the establishment of constituency councils and constituency empowerment centres. That will be part of a comprehensive programme that will include the provision of safety nets for those in need of such provisioning, but has as its goal the ultimate empowerment of individuals and communities alike. It will provide a pathway to progress that is seamless, as the various agencies involved in social service delivery will be operating within an institutional framework aimed at motivating the most vulnerable among us to move from a position of powerlessness to one of interdependence in which they will be able to make a meaningful contribution to national development.

Education has been at the centre of Barbados' social and economic development strategy for many years. That accounts for the country's achievement of universal access to primary education and the fact that education is compulsory up to age 16. As such, Barbados has met the targets identified in Millennium Development Goal 2. In that regard, we are well on the way in pursuing an MDG-plus mandate in that area. For example, there is universal access to secondary education, tuition-free post-secondary education and, more recently, the commitment of the Government to achieving universal pre-primary education for children between the ages of three and five. Several nursery schools have already been established in the island, some by the State and others in partnership with the private sector.

Good health is viewed as a human right in Barbados. Thus, for many years there has been universal access to health care. As a consequence, child mortality rates are below global levels and Barbados' maternal mortality rate is one of the lowest in the Caribbean region at 0.9 per 1,000.

Unfortunately, we are still struggling with the HIV/AIDS pandemic. It is estimated that approximately 1.8 per cent of Barbados' population is infected with HIV/AIDS. Of concern is the age group 15-49, which the pandemic has impacted the most. Nevertheless, word coming from the National HIV/AIDS Commission recently indicates that there are signs of behavioural change among that segment of the population. Also encouraging is the increasing number of persons coming forward to be voluntarily tested at the various health fairs across the island and the health tents that have been set up with some frequency in strategic places across the country under the auspices of various coalitions formed to assist in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

There has been a tendency within the international community to be lukewarm, to say the least, in addressing the needs of countries that are MDG-plus. That is compounded when such countries happen to be small island developing States, which bring their own peculiarities and vulnerabilities to the table, as in the case of Barbados. Their needs are not being adequately addressed through the Monterrey Consensus on financing for development, nor is full cooperation being received from the international community or resources committed to the implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, adopted in 1994, and the subsequent Mauritius Strategy of 2005.

We therefore call for the forging of stronger development partnerships among member States in both North-South and South-South cooperation. In addition, the private sector, particularly companies and organizations operating in the North, should be called upon to support the efforts of developing countries. In other words, the MDGs cannot be fully achieved without the full operationalization of MDG 8. In these challenging times, we have no option.

We are all duty-bound to join together in doubling our efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. They provide us with an excellent framework in which sustained development can be pursued. I urge that we assist each other during the journey towards their achievement.

The President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Maitha Al Shamsi, Minister of State of the United Arab Emirates.

Mrs. Al Shamsi (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me at the outset to express to you, Mr. President, on behalf of the United Arab Emirates delegation, our deep gratitude and appreciation for the convening of this important meeting and for your efforts in directing it. We wish you every success and the best of outcomes.

We were hoping that, since more than half the time set to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) has lapsed, we would have been more than halfway towards achieving those Goals. But the last report on the MDGs indicates that the progress achieved in the three major areas has been slower than expected. Moreover, there are still numerous challenges facing a number of developing countries, mainly in Africa. All of this threatens to delay the achievement of the Goals until after 2015.

The United Arab Emirates is firmly convinced that the eradication of poverty and hunger is a major step towards supporting and maintaining peace and security in the world. We recognize that succeeding in overcoming these challenges undoubtedly requires a strong global partnership in which the developed, developing and poor countries assume their responsibilities, as agreed in the Millennium Declaration and at other conferences and forums on development, in particular the Monterrey Consensus.

In this regard, we urge developed countries to fulfil their commitment to devote 0.7 per cent of gross national income to official development assistance for developing countries and to alleviate or even cancel their debts. We stress the importance of giving developing countries the opportunity to participate in the global market in a just and equitable manner and of providing them with up-to-date technical assistance to enable them to build their human capacities, develop their societies, mobilize their national resources and attract foreign direct investment in order to achieve their development goals.

In the meantime, we urge developing countries to adopt economic policies that are income-generating and conducive to production. By doing so, they will create an appropriate national environment to attract foreign direct investment. They should also support and energize the private sector.

My country has an outstanding record with respect to achieving the MDGs and dealing with typical economic challenges facing developing countries. In a very short period, we have secured some significant achievements. We have succeeded in consolidating political and social security through the adoption of policies that focused primarily on the development of human capital. We succeeded by investing our oil revenues — the main source of our national income — in such a way as to diversify and expand the production base and the sources of national income, emphasizing industry, commerce, agriculture, tourism and services. In addition, we pursued free-market policies and provided incentives to stimulate the private sector and create a suitable environment for attracting foreign direct investment.

With this rational economic policy, we succeeded in eradicating poverty completely and raising the average per capita income to the highest level in the Middle East and one of the highest in the world.

In the meantime, we were able to lower the percentage of people with a very low income level to less than 1 per cent of the total number of families. Our present goal is to maintain this high standard of living and enhance it.

As regards the goal of universal primary education, our country recognizes the importance of education in achieving human development, national security and stability. Accordingly, we have supported compulsory primary education for all free of charge, raising the percentage of enrolment for capable children of both sexes in elementary schools to 89 per

cent. It is forecasted that we will reach 100-per-cent enrolment before 2015.

We were able to reduce the childhood mortality rate by two thirds by developing and improving the health-care sector, especially in areas such as maternal and childcare. Here, we succeeded in reducing the under-five mortality rate to 9.4 per 1,000. We expect to reduce it further to 6.5 per 1,000 by 2015.

It is estimated that 94 per cent of children have been immunized against childhood diseases. We expect to reach 100-per-cent immunization by 2015. In the meantime, we have been able to reduce the post-natal mortality rate by 86 per cent, as against the required rate of 75 per cent. Furthermore, 100 per cent of the births in the Emirates are attended by skilled health personnel.

As to the eradication of HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis, the United Arab Emirates has the lowest HIV prevalence in the world. In 2002, it was declared free of malaria, while the programme to combat tuberculosis was successful in reducing the rate of tuberculosis deaths to less than 1 per cent, that is, to 0.46 per cent.

My country has been an effective and active partner in the global partnership for development and the achievement of the MDGs, through its commitment to implementing the recommendations of conferences on development and its effective contributions to United Nations agencies and international and regional institutions concerned with development assistance. We also participate directly in the implementation of development programmes in developing countries.

My country contributes 3.6 per cent of its gross national product for development assistance to developing countries, assistance which is put towards combating diseases, building hospitals and supporting education. Moreover, private initiatives are undertaken to provide necessary financing for specific programmes, including the "Dubai Cares" campaign launched in 2007 to provide basic education for one million children in developing countries, especially in Africa.

In conclusion, let me express the hope that we will be able, thanks to this meeting, to take stock of how far we have come in implementing the MDGs, to pinpoint any problems or obstacles that stand in the way of the full and timely achievement of those Goals and to identify practical means of reaching them.

The President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Iryna Kryuchkova, Deputy Minister of Economy of Ukraine.

Ms. Kryuchkova (Ukraine) (*spoke in Russian*): I wish first to align my delegation with the statement made by the delegation of Slovenia on behalf of the European Union and then to touch on some issues that are of particular importance for our country.

Ukraine was one of the first countries in the post-Soviet space to respond to the initiative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, and to subscribe to the Millennium Declaration. In 2003, the Government began to adapt the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and drafted the first national report, "MDGs Ukraine". Then it established two further reports — "MDGs Ukraine 2000+5" and, most recently, "MDGs Ukraine 2000+7". Those reports provided data on social and economic development in Ukraine midway to 2015, the deadline for achieving the MDGs.

Ukraine is currently at the stage where national agreement must be reached and it must craft a long-term development strategy on the basis of the MDGs. The main areas of activity on the road to attaining the MDGs include building institutional capacity for the design of poverty reduction policies, carrying out socio-economic policies oriented to the MDGs, establishing a transparent system for monitoring achievement of the MDGs for the public, integrating MDG goals, objectives and indicators in the planning and programming documents of the State planning system, and incorporating the MDGs in national and local development strategies.

Adapting the MDGs for Ukraine consists in establishing at the national level six goals, each with 13 activities and 33 appropriate indicators with which to monitor success in attaining the goals each year. We have set the following national development goals for Ukraine: poverty reduction, providing life-long education of high quality, achieving sustainable development of the environment, improving maternal health and reducing infant mortality, limiting the spread of HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis and reducing their scale, and ensuring gender equality.

The matrix of activities and indicators for the national MDGs is based on the concept of human

development and covers the surveying and monitoring of the living standards of the population and the quality of social services provided over the long term. The Ministry of the Economy, which bears the chief responsibility for coordinating the preparation of strategies and programmes, ensures that MDG activities and indicators are reflected in governmental decisions pertaining to economic and social policy.

The new Government, headed by Mrs. Yulia Tymoshenko, the Prime Minister, has developed a programme called "Ukrainian breakthrough", which has been in place for 100 days already. Its priority areas include reducing poverty, closing income gaps and raising social standards in general. The Government has also developed a medium-term programme to improve Ukraine's competitiveness in the context of European and Euro-Atlantic integration up to 2015. We expect its implementation will provide us with the necessary resources to meet our MDG commitments.

I wish now to speak about the stage we have reached in our implementation of the MDG activities. For the first goal, overcoming poverty, we have established two objectives. We plan to halve the number of people living on less than $4.30 a day — in terms of purchasing power parity — by reducing the percentage from 11.9 in 2000 to 5.5 in 2015. We also intend to reduce the number of people living below the nationally defined poverty line by one third, from 27.2 per cent in 2001 to 18.4 per cent in 2015.

With regard to the first objective, we have already had some success. Currently, only 1 per cent of our population is living on less than $4.30 a day in terms of purchasing power parity. However, the poverty level as defined by our national criteria is set at 75 per cent of median income, and the same number of people live below it as did in 2001. That fact is a result of constantly improving living standards, which in turn causes the median income level of the population to rise. Thus over the past four years, real income has increased 1.8 times, simultaneously causing the national criteria for poverty to be upgraded.

To make a breakthrough in this area, the Government decided to increase the minimum old-age pension to the minimum subsistence level for the unemployed. That measure went into effect on 1 April — yesterday. The minimum wage will be at the subsistence level for the working population as of 1 January 2009. There is an improvement in social provisions for families with children, particularly where births are concerned. There are also improvements in the many other subsistence-based indicators.

Government policy is aimed at increasing the income of the poorest population groups, thereby helping to reduce polarization due to income gaps. At the same time, it addresses the problem of poverty among families with children.

The second goal is to provide life-long education of high quality. Traditionally, Ukraine has been characterized by a high level of education and by the competitiveness of its labour force. We are endeavouring to have higher education in Ukraine be more in line with the requirements of young people and the labour market. When Ukraine joined the Bologna Process in May 2005, it had to reshape its system of higher education in order to meet international requirements. With regard to education in general, we are following the policy agenda set. Currently, the Government is seeking to harmonize its education standards with those that apply in Europe.

The third goal is to ensure sustainable development of the environment. Thanks to structural changes in the economy in recent years, together with improvements in the mechanisms governing the environment, we have seen a relative stabilization in the environmental situation in Ukraine. The process of introducing the Kyoto Protocol machinery is under way. However, we still lag behind in a number of areas and with respect to two objectives.

The first of those objectives is to increase the proportion of the population with access to clean water from 86 per cent to 93 per cent in towns and from 63 per cent to 72 per cent in villages. Progress in that area is still very modest. The second objective is to stabilize air pollution from static sources. The volume of harmful emissions in the atmosphere is not expected to increase, despite economic growth, or to exceed 4.1 million tons per year. The Government's programme is aimed at tightening environmental standards and decisively improving environmental management. We hope to attain those objectives by 2015.

The fourth goal is to improve maternal health and reduce infant mortality. Maternal mortality in Ukraine has been declining since 1995. It was 24.7 per 100,000

live births in 2000, compared to 11.5 in 2006. Infant mortality has also declined: it ranged between 14.9 and 14.7 per 1,000 live births between 1993 and 1995 and declined to 9.8 by 2006. There has been similar progress with regard to the mortality for children under five.

The Government has put in place a system to assist young families, solve their housing problems and help single mothers and newborn infants. In addition, we have reorganized our maternity clinics and provided wards with resuscitation equipment for newborns weighing less than one kilogram. The Government has drawn up and is implementing a number of targeted programmes to reduce infant and maternal mortality, and we hope to make significant progress in that area.

Our fifth goal is combating the spread of HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis. Unfortunately, Ukraine has one of the highest rates of HIV/AIDS infection in Europe. Each year the number of HIV cases is growing. There were 13,800 cases in 2005 and 16,100 in 2006.

Even though in 2006 the prevalence rate for tuberculosis fell by 1 per cent in Ukraine and the death rate from tuberculosis dropped by 12.2 per cent, the situation is still far from satisfactory. Over the past 15 years the incidence of the disease has increased 2.4 times and the mortality rate 2.7 times. The Government is currently developing a number of targeted programmes to address those problems, but we still need international assistance in this area.

The sixth goal is to ensure gender equality. On 8 September 2005, the Ukrainian Parliament adopted a law ensuring equal rights and opportunities for women and men. In 2006, unemployment among women was 1.5 times higher than among men. Also in 2006, the average wage for women was 72.8 per cent that of men, compared with 70.9 per cent in 2005, so there has been some improvement there. We have also seen improved female representation in central and local organs of executive power and the upper chamber of the Ukrainian Parliament.

Countries can achieve their development goals provided that Government, the private sector and civil society join efforts and that economic competitiveness and public-private cooperation in seeking to achieve them are enhanced. We must also find common ways to meet new challenges to global society.

I also wish to note that Ukraine supports the statement made by the representative of Slovenia on behalf of the European Union.

The President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Richard Konteh, Deputy Minister of Finance and Development of Sierra Leone.

Mr. Konteh (Sierra Leone): Allow me to express my Government's sincere appreciation to you, Sir, for organizing this high-level thematic debate on recognizing the achievements, addressing the challenges and getting back on track to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015.

My country aligns itself with the statement made by the Minister of State of Antigua and Barbuda on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

I wish to further reiterate my delegation's appreciation for the Secretary-General's foresight and initiative in establishing the MDG Africa Steering Group, which focuses on developing synergies aimed at helping Africa to attain the targets of the MDGs within the remaining years.

Addressing the MDGs continues to be a major preoccupation for a country like Sierra Leone, which has recently emerged from over 11 years of devastating civil war. Sierra Leone continues to rank at the bottom of the Human Development Index with high levels of poverty, maternal, child and infant mortality, and illiteracy rates. Even though we take pride as a nation in the positive gains we have achieved in deepening democracy and good governance, our fragile democracy is further threatened by the global increase in fuel and food prices.

Government's priority in the short to medium term is therefore mainly focused on the provision of energy as a vehicle for economic growth and development; the provision of safe and accessible potable water supplies; revitalizing agricultural production and productivity to meet the basic food needs of the population; improved and affordable health service delivery; increased access to education for all, with special emphasis on the girl child; improved infrastructural development; public sector reforms and capacity-building for the civil service; and youth empowerment and employment creation.

In order to achieve the aforementioned, Government in 2005 developed a poverty reduction strategy with support from development partners. The

strategy was overly weighted towards reducing poverty, with very little if any emphasis placed on promoting growth. That explains why the second-generation poverty reduction strategy now lays emphasis on growth and poverty eradication.

Government recognizes the significant role that the private sector could play as a catalyst for growth. Government cannot do it alone. The aim therefore is to promote public-private partnership. It is rather unfortunate, though, that the private sector in Sierra Leone is currently very weak. Every effort must therefore be put into strengthening the private sector. All that notwithstanding, Sierra Leone has achieved some success in reaching the MDGs, although we still do not think we can achieve the MDGs by 2015.

We reduced under-five mortality rates from about 327 per 1,000 in 1985 to about 194 per 1,000 in 2004. We reduced maternal mortality rates from about 700 per 100,000 in 1990 to about 495 per 100,000 in 2005. The population using improved water sources rated at 57 per cent in 2004, while those using improved sanitation rated at about 39 per cent. Official development assistance as a percentage of gross domestic product rose from 9.1 in 1990 to 28.8 in 2005, and net foreign direct investment inflows as a percentage of gross domestic product dropped from 5 in 1992 to 4.9 in 2005.

In the area of education, primary school attendance has increased substantially over the past five years, with the net primary school attendance rate rising to 69 per cent. The gender disparity index shows an encouraging trend, with the gap between boys and girls steadily narrowing.

There are, however, a number of challenges which Sierra Leone continues to face as we combat those daunting problems in our quest to achieve the MDGs. Among them are rapidly increasing oil prices; increasing prices of food commodities, especially our staple food, rice; unpredictable and short-term aid flows that make planning for development difficult; lack of ownership of the development agenda by national Governments; and generic conditionalities set for developing countries irrespective of their status of development.

In terms of our way forward and in order to get things back on track, Government has put in place a number of measures, among which are the development of a second-generation poverty reduction strategy paper that will focus on growth and poverty reduction; the preparation of a longer-term 10-year strategic national development plan; the launching of a national strategy for the development of statistics, which we believe will help to give us more up-to-date and reliable data to be able to monitor our development progress; the development of sectoral strategic plans for various sectors — including agriculture, health, mining, education and even finance — that will feed into the second poverty reduction strategy paper and the strategic national development plan; improved domestic revenue generation and public financial management; the creation of an enabling environment for trade and development; investment in people through capacity-building; investment in health and education programmes; a comprehensive approach to development; public-private partnership and partnership with the broader civil society; the promotion of small- and medium-scale enterprises; and attitudinal change, which is a major hallmark of our President's vision for development.

In conclusion, we believe that the monitoring and evaluation of our overall progress towards achieving the MDGs is very critical, as it would help promote not only accountability, but also transparency and coordination. My Government has therefore put in place a robust technical team drawn from all the ministries, departments and agencies and the donor community to track implementation within the broader framework of our programmes under the poverty reduction strategy paper. Also, the statistical capacity of our ministries, departments and agencies is being strengthened to provide the clarity with which poverty reduction can be monitored, as well as to track poverty-related expenditures.

In closing, Sierra Leone cannot, however, achieve the MDGs without the requisite financial and technical support. Government on its part is putting in place measures to ensure better leadership and ownership in fulfilling our development agenda. We therefore call on all our development partners, bilateral and multilateral alike, to increase aid to Sierra Leone to complement Government's efforts. What we need in Sierra Leone is official development assistance, not assistance that comes very late.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Bounkeut Sangsomsak, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Lao People's Democratic Republic.

Mr. Sangsomsak (Lao People's Democratic Republic): At the outset, I should like to commend you, Sir, for taking the initiative to convene this important and timely meeting, which will help us to address the constraints and challenges we face in leading up to 2015.

My delegation would like to associate itself with the statements made on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and the groups of least developed and land-locked developing countries.

As we approach the halfway point of achieving our ultimate objective by 2015, there has been concrete and significant progress in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals — but it is still far from satisfactory. Our panel discussion yesterday reflected the fact that much more needs to be done if we are to achieve our goals. It is clear that our great diversity is characterized by uneven distribution of wealth, at both the regional and the international levels and between countries and regions alike.

Since their adoption in 2000, the Government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic has attached great importance to the effective implementation of the Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals. To that end, the Millennium Development Goals have been tailored and incorporated into our national poverty eradication policy and our five-year national socio-economic development plan, which constitutes the Government's strategy to achieve sustainable poverty eradication through accelerated economic growth. It gives priority to the 47 districts identified as the poorest in the country, with a view to ensuring their progressive integration into the national economy. As a road map to achieving the MDGs, the national five-year socio-economic development plan is implemented through 11 programmes that break down into 111 concrete projects to be carried out at the central and local levels.

Given the importance of the MDGs, the Government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic has set up a national monitoring committee on the implementation of Millennium Development Goals that is mandated to promote and coordinate nationwide implementation of the MDGs. In addition, the Government has established a national committee on rural development and poverty eradication. The committee's structure entails a network across the country that comprises both the central and local levels. It has a mandate to promote the implementation of the Government's strategy on rural development and poverty eradication. In that context, a poverty eradication fund has been set up to mobilize additional resources, with a view to addressing inadequate financing.

In carrying out the national poverty eradication strategy, the Government has made a great effort to address the issue of financing. In that regard, the Government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic strongly promotes investment in small and medium-sized enterprises in rural areas, in sectors where we have a national comparative advantage, in emerging areas with potential, such as hydropower and ecotourism, and in areas where there is a geographical advantage, such as east-west transit links known as the east-west corridor.

The implementation of the MDGs in the Lao People's Democratic Republic has made relatively steady progress. Since the publication of the first MDG report, in 2004, the Lao People's Democratic Republic has been successful in sustaining robust economic growth, with real gross domestic product growth of 8 per cent in 2007. The poverty rate has been reduced from 48 per cent in 1990 to 28 per cent in 2007. The percentage of the budget devoted to the education sector has increased from 11 per cent in 2000 to 16 per cent in 2007. The net enrolment rate in primary schools has risen from 58 per cent in 1991 to 84 per cent in 2005. The literacy rate at the primary age level has almost doubled, going from 31 per cent to 58 per cent. As regards child and infant mortality, the mortality rate for children under the age of five declined from 170 per 1,000 to 98 per 1,000 and the infant mortality rate from 104 per 1,000 to 70 per 1,000 between 1995 and 2005. At that rate, the mortality targets set by the MDGs for 2015 seem within reach.

Despite that steady progress, there are still obstacles to overcome in order to meet the targets by 2015. One of the major challenges is to sustain the level of economic growth achieved over the previous decade in the face of high oil and food prices. There is also a need for the Government to address the disparity between people living in urban and rural areas in terms of their ability to improve their livelihoods, including their access to health and education, by reaping the benefits of economic growth.

Mr. Soborun (Mauritius), Vice-President, took the Chair.

In that regard, international assistance is needed to help the country address the specific constraints I have outlined, especially in the areas of human and institutional capacity-building and essential infrastructure development, such as transport facilities and telecommunications.

The Lao People's Democratic Republic is in the process of acceding to membership of the World Trade Organization. We believe that procedures should be made simpler and more streamlined in order to speed up the process.

In conclusion, it is worth recalling that it is the shared responsibility of developed and developing countries to implement their joint commitments with more resources and more action, so that the Millennium Development Goals can be achieved successfully by 2015.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Ramzy Ezzeldin Ramzy, Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs for Economic Relations and International Cooperation of Egypt.

Mr. Ramzy (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to welcome the decision of the President of the General Assembly to convene this thematic debate on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), particularly at this important juncture of the midway point to the agreed deadline of 2015 to achieve the Goals. This debate provides an opportunity to take stock of what has been achieved to date and to harness efforts to face up to the challenges confronting a large number of developing countries that are still a long way off track in their efforts to achieve the Goals, especially in Africa.

I should also like to express my support for the statement delivered by the representative of Antigua and Barbuda on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and for the statement to be delivered by the Democratic Republic of the Congo, on behalf of the African States.

Eradicating poverty poses the greatest challenge to efforts aimed at achieving sustainable development in developing countries. There is, therefore, a need for a genuine partnership among members of the international community as a whole. In that regard, we welcome the General Assembly's adoption at this session of the resolution proclaiming the Second United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty (2008-2017).

In recognition of their primary responsibility for their own development and in line with their international commitments, many developing countries have begun to draft and implement pro-poor national policies and strategies aimed at improving the living standards of their citizens. They have also begun to implement many sound macroeconomic policies and to reform their legal, customs and tax systems. However, they still face challenges that constrain their ability to make tangible progress in that regard. One such constraint is the absence of sufficient policy flexibility to allow them to strike a balance between their national policies and their international commitments. That is a crucial issue that affects the freedom of developing countries to put in place strategic public expenditure policies aimed at eradicating poverty.

In the same context, the efforts of developing countries to eradicate poverty require an appropriate international environment that will enable these efforts to go forward at the national level. This calls for an increase in the volume of qualitative official development assistance (ODA) directed to developing countries, together with comprehensive initiatives for external debt relief. It also necessitates reaching an agreement that addresses the imbalance in the international trading system.

In addition, the developing world lacks the sufficient voice and necessary representation to influence the international economic decision-making process. Most international economic decisions that have major impact on the world economy as a whole — and that directly influence the economies of developing countries — are taken in the absence of developing countries, although their share of the international economy has increased.

In that context, we reaffirm the importance of the efforts of the United Nations to eradicate poverty — the core mandate of the Organization's development work — in many developing countries through its operational activities. We look forward to the continuation and strengthening of that role in order to support the efforts made by developing countries at the national level. We would also like to emphasize the role played by various other international and regional organizations — including the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund — as well as the role of

civil society and the private sector, in support of the efforts of developing countries.

Statistics and numbers confirm the strong organic link that exists between the eradication of poverty and the achievement of MDGs 2 and 3. Today, a few days before the observance of Global Action Week on Education for All, millions of girls are still illiterate and lack educational opportunities at every level. That poses an obstacle to many developing countries' achievement of the MDGs on education by 2015. Nevertheless, developing countries are continuing to make efforts to achieve gender equality at all levels of education, as well as to enhance the quality of education to meet international standards so that young people can enjoy equal and competitive opportunities in employment and in the labour market.

We would like to emphasize the importance of joint international efforts to enhance and raise the national capacities of developing countries to enable them to adopt effective programmes to reduce child mortality and to provide the necessary reproductive health care. It is also important to promote the roles of non-governmental organizations and civil society in those areas.

Egypt attaches great importance to reducing the rate of child mortality. Our efforts have led to a decrease in the under-five mortality rate, which, according to UNICEF statistics, dropped from 91,000 in 1990 to 35,000 in 2006. Egypt is therefore well poised to achieve MDG 4, namely, to reduce child mortality rates by two thirds by 2015.

The Egyptian Government has continued to improve its health insurance system while at the same time encouraging the role of the private sector. We have also expanded the scope of awareness campaigns, in cooperation with the World Health Organization and UNICEF. That has resulted in the reduction of the maternal mortality rate to 84 per 100,000 in 2006, as well as an increase in the life expectancy of women, which is now 107 per cent in comparison to that of men. We have also made efforts to expand the reach of services provided to women in rural areas, with the aim of achieving MDG 5 by reducing maternal mortality rates by 75 per cent.

There is no question that HIV/AIDS is one of the major obstacles to achieving the new MDGs by 2015, in particular Goal 6. Preventing and combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis is inextricably linked to the overall development process. Statistics in the most recent report of the Secretary-General bear out the relationship between malaria and poverty. That is an issue that requires the support of the international community for efforts to develop the infrastructures of economic, educational and health systems. There is also a need to change society's views about dealing with those diseases, to improve our ability to detect them at an early stage and to treat them with the support of all sectors of society. Lastly, there is a need for the transfer of the necessary technology and knowledge in order to support those efforts.

We urge the international community to attach greater importance to the challenges faced by developing countries, in a manner similar to the importance it has recently attached to issues such as climate change. In that regard, I would like to commend the efforts of the Secretary-General to achieve the MDGs, particularly in Africa, and to establish a steering group for that purpose, whose work we hope will contribute to supporting the efforts of African Governments in achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

In that context, we also welcome any and all initiatives intended to contribute to the achievement of the MDGs, in particular in Africa. Those include the General Assembly's high-level meeting on Africa's development needs to be held in September, the initiative announced by the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom to establish a new partnership between the private and public sectors and civil society in order to accelerate the implementation of the MDGs, and the cooperation between the Spanish Government and the United Nations Development Programme to establish a joint fund to support implementation of those goals. We call for coordination and complementarity between those initiatives in order to strengthen the prospects for their success.

We also look forward to the outcomes and recommendations of the various meetings on development to be held this year. We hope they will provide additional momentum to the Review Conference on Financing for Development scheduled to be held in Doha from 29 November to 2 December 2008. The financing for development process is the embodiment of the global partnership for development, with implementation of the MDGs at its core.

The role of the United Nations in following up on the implementation of the outcomes and decisions of United Nations conferences and summits in the economic and social fields is of the utmost importance. Many commitments remain unimplemented, and therefore have a negative impact on the credibility of the United Nations in carrying out its developmental role.

Despite our support for the convening of this thematic debate to address poverty, health and education — as they are of special importance to us — we would have liked the debate to also address MDG 8, on the global partnership for development, for this discussion is taking place in the context of international cooperation, which does not pertain to the commitments of developing countries alone. We also call for the establishment of an intergovernmental mechanism for sustained follow-up to accurately take stock of what has been achieved and to identify the necessary means to get on track towards achieving the Goals. In that connection, we welcome today's call by the President of the General Assembly to continue to hold such annual thematic debates on this subject in order to continue to follow up on the achievement of the MDGs.

I would like to emphasize that the international development agenda is not confined to the MDGs alone, as there exist other internationally agreed development goals reached during various relevant summits and conferences of the United Nations. Together they constitute the international development agenda.

In conclusion, I would like to refer to the importance of considering a new international consensus for the post-2015 phase, which should not be considered as the end of the road. That new international consensus should take into account the interests of middle-income countries, which despite progress in certain areas still represent half of the world's poor.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Carolina Rentería, Director-General of the National Planning Department of Colombia.

Mrs. Rentería (Colombia) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation associates itself with the statement delivered by Antigua and Barbuda on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and with the statement to be delivered by Mexico on behalf of the Rio Group.

Over the past five years, Colombia has experienced high and sustained economic growth, primarily driven by investment. The average growth rate for that period was 5.3 per cent, and 7.5 per cent in 2007. The investment rate went from 15.7 per cent in 2002 to 27.8 per cent in 2007, of which 21 per cent was private investment, and net foreign direct investment added $8.56 billion. The Government is committed to translating that economic growth into concrete well-being in the country, especially for the most needy.

Colombia has therefore included the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) agenda as an essential element of its social and development policies. In particular, we have aimed at aligning our poverty reduction and equity promotion strategy with the MDGs. Consequently, in March 2005, the Government formalized the country's commitments and strategies for the achievement of the MDGs, which were further incorporated in the national development plan for 2006-2010, entitled "A communitarian State: development for all". In that way, social investment, which constitutes 56 per cent of our investment resources, will be focused on groups and regions that lag furthest behind at the subnational level. The country is consistently making progress towards the fulfilment of the MDGs by 2015, and in some cases even earlier, by 2010.

It is worthwhile to provide some examples of the progress made towards the MDGs in Colombia: extreme poverty, which had had a baseline of 21.6 per cent in 2002, had dropped to 12 per cent by 2006. For the period 2007-2010, more than $10 billion has been earmarked in order to give priority to reducing the poverty rate to 8 per cent by 2010. That would imply reaching the target for that indicator, which is 8.8 per cent, five years before its 2015 deadline. We underline that that goal is more ambitious than the universal goal established at the Millennium Summit, given the fact that our extreme poverty line is 3.6 times higher than the one defined then.

Gross coverage in basic education, which was at 80 per cent in 1996, went up to 92 per cent in 2006. With investments of more than $25 billion for the period from 2007 to 2010, Colombia will reach universal coverage in 2010, five years earlier than

expected. Eighty per cent of those resources are managed by decentralized territorial entities, in a country that is extremely decentralized.

Similarly, universal health insurance coverage will be reached by 2009, with a major impact on health indicators. It will eliminate the financial barriers that limit access to services, with guaranteed comprehensive coverage to meet the health needs of the population. In order to achieve that goal, Colombia will have invested resources worth in excess of $16.5 billion by 2010. Universal insurance coverage will mean better indicators with regard to maternal and child health and the treatment of priority communicable diseases such as HIV/AIDS, dengue fever and malaria.

Another major challenge for the country will be improving housing and basic sanitation conditions. During the period 2007-2010, the Government expects to fund more than 828,000 social housing solutions, and more than 3.6 million new persons will be provided with piped water, for a total of 43 million Colombians. Four million more will be provided with sewage services, for a total of 41.1 million people.

Overcoming rural poverty is the greatest challenge facing Colombia. We need to provide capacity-building to small farmers so that they will have sufficient and sustainable income. That will depend on access to primary factors of production, financing, technical rural assistance, business support services and training. Improving access to and the quality of education and health, public services and living conditions in the Colombian countryside is a priority of ours.

Colombia is also making progress in ensuring environmental sustainability. For instance, more than 30,000 hectares have been reforested in recent years and more than a million hectares have been incorporated into the national parks system, totalling more than 11 million hectares. By 2006, the country had also succeeded in eliminating 44 per cent of the total amount of ozone-depleting substances that existed in 2003, and we aim at reaching 0 tons by 2010.

As a strategy for making progress in the promotion of the global partnership for development, Colombia works to ensure that resources from participants and the United Nations system are in line with our national development policies, so as to significantly contribute to the fulfilment of the MDGs.

We are concerned to strengthen our national policies for the achievement of the MDGs, taking into account the challenges represented by the regional asymmetries that exist in the country. Colombia therefore requires, through technical and financial cooperation, the constant support and assistance of the international community and of the United Nations system and multilateral financial institutions, in order to reach those Goals in a balanced manner in the various regions of the country. In addition, Colombia believes that it is important and vital that the international community consider the elaboration of more effective criteria to assist middle-income countries, including through the implementation of innovative financial mechanisms.

Given that one of the greatest challenges ahead for the accomplishment of the MDGs consists in making progress in narrowing social, regional and urban-rural gaps, we have improved and strengthened our targeting tools for public spending. Colombia has an instrument for specific targeting that is becoming increasingly strong, reliable and transparent. We are improving the operational processes for subsidies selection and provision, and we are moving towards a policy based on a social-promotion rather than a social-assistance approach, which effectively ensures the rights of the people, the exercise of citizenship, the inclusion of the poor and excluded and social cohesion.

We are proud of the fact that Colombia is the first middle-income country of Latin America to design and carry out a comprehensive strategy for poverty and inequality reduction, the implementation of which is going forward. That strategy aims at, among other things, coordinating the provision of social services by the State in order to overcome, from a structural perspective, families' extreme poverty conditions. We are carrying out an unprecedented effort to effect managerial and institutional transformation through the Juntos Network, a fundamental pillar of the social promotion system.

Families in extreme poverty in the Juntos Network — more than 1.5 million families, including 440,000 families affected by forced displacement — must attain, with the support and follow-up of the system's institutions, 46 basic goals that contribute to overcoming extreme poverty. Those goals cover nine areas: identification; income and employment, including training for employment, access to assets and productive projects; preschool and primary, secondary

and post-secondary education; health, namely access to the health insurance system; nutrition; habitability, that is, basic living conditions and sanitation; family dynamics; banking and savings, including access to banking services and micro-insurance; and access to legal support services. Personalized assistance to the families in their homes and communities is provided through social workers; this will enable them to overcome the situation within a framework of shared responsibility. In this way, the families become agents and promoters of their own development.

The development, coordination and consolidation of the social protection system constitute a great challenge. The system is universal in nature. It is financed by State subsidies focused on poor and vulnerable families and by contributions with those with the ability to pay. It coordinates strategies and mechanisms for protection, social development, human resources development and access to funding in order to prevent risks and mitigate and overcome impact on families and populations.

Colombia has also made significant progress in the promotion of gender equality. Thanks to equality in basic education coverage, with even better educational achievement attained by women, we have focused on gender equality in the labour market and on the reduction of domestic violence, in particular that directed against women partners. To this end, we have implemented measures such as the inclusion of a gender-based approach in plans, programmes and public policies and follow-up and evaluation through a labour market observatory which examines labour statistics disaggregated by gender. We have also implemented intersector strategies to prevent and address domestic violence.

In addition, Colombia has made progress in involving civil society and the private sector in follow-up and assessment of the MDGs. Jointly with the United Nations system, we published and distributed our MDG report, which is entitled "Towards a more inclusive and equitable Colombia". The document was introduced at a nationally broadcast Saturday-long Government town hall meeting, at which each of the relevant national-level entities reported on its achievements and on the challenges ahead. A second follow-up report, developed and disseminated in the same manner, will be issued this year.

We are aware of our particular challenges and internal difficulties, and Colombia, its Government and its citizens are committed to achieve and sometimes to exceed the planned goals, honouring the commitments undertaken at the Millennium Summit. Colombia has a dream, a vision of a country built on trust, which is based on three fundamental premises: security based on democracy; socially responsible investment, developed through a transparent relationship between investors and the State, through committed solidarity with communities, especially in the environmental field, and through fraternal labour relations in which hate among social classes is not encouraged; and, social cohesion based on freedom.

My country's challenge is not solely to meet the national targets we have set with regard to the MDGs, but rather, fundamentally, to attain them as part of a strategy for accelerated social development that is internationally competitive, regionally balanced, inclusive and peaceful.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Mr. Gareth Thomas, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for International Development, of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Thomas (United Kingdom): The United Kingdom supports the statement made by my Slovenian colleague this morning on behalf of the European Union (EU).

In 2000, the international community declared that we would spare no effort to achieve the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Huge progress has been made. But halfway to 2015, our pace is too slow. The United Kingdom Government is deeply committed to delivering the Millennium Development Goals and has focused on a handful of themes which we consider critical to their achievement.

When almost one billion people are living below the poverty line, it is clearly essential to increase levels of economic growth and the volume of trade between countries. When 72 million children were still out of primary school, as recently as 2005, helping countries to build more schools and hire more teachers is also clearly essential. Nor can we ignore the importance of child mortality, when more than 10 million children die before their fifth birthday. In short, we need to reignite international attention, enthusiasm and action to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

We will achieve the progress we all want only if we can increase aid. Our aid volumes in the United Kingdom are on track to reach 0.7 per cent of gross national income by 2013, well ahead of schedule. However, we agree with the European Union and with the President of the General Assembly that a concerted effort from across the international community is now needed to meet the pledges we all made back in 2005.

Yesterday we heard the President of the General Assembly, Srgjan Kerim, say that 2008 was a window of opportunity to accelerate progress on the MDGs. The Secretary-General himself echoed those sentiments when he said that 2008 should mark a turning point in progress towards the MDGs.

In January, the Secretary-General and my Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, were joined by representatives from Governments, from the private sector and from civil society in launching a year of action on the MDGs. At every possible opportunity this year, we need to work together to promote further action. Any action we take, of course, must address implementation gaps and must scale up the successes that there have been.

As part of the United Kingdom's contribution to this effort, we will co-host a meeting of chief executive officers of major companies with the United Nations Development Programme, in London on 6 May. That meeting will showcase how the private sector can use core business expertise to support growth and reduce poverty in developing countries.

Between now and September there are a number of international forums where accelerating progress on the Millennium Development Goals can and must be discussed. In particular, of course, there is the Economic and Social Council. I am delighted that I will be there to deliver our presentation and to set out the United Kingdom's progress towards reaching our commitments under the Millennium Development Goals, and, of course, towards helping others to reach theirs.

Most important, the Secretary-General and the President of the General Assembly will co-host a high-level meeting on the MDGs in New York on 25 September. That meeting will bring together world leaders, civil society and the private sector. Much has been said during today's meeting about the need for actions, not just words. We hope countries will use the 25 September meeting as an opportunity to set out specific commitments and practical action plans on the MDGs that they will take forward.

Just last week our Prime Minister Gordon Brown and the French President, Nicolas Sarkozy, announced a partnership to help get 16 million children into school by 2010. In September last year, Gordon Brown, together with ministers from developing and donor nations, launched the International Health Partnership to improve donor, country and agency work on the way that aid money is spent in the area of health.

I encourage all nations to attend the meeting in September and, in line with the examples I have just mentioned, consider how they can contribute to accelerate action to meet the Millennium Development Goals.

Today we have the knowledge, we have the technology and we have the wealth to make a difference for millions of people on our planet, helping to lift them out of the grinding poverty that still faces too many of them, and giving them the opportunity to learn, the opportunity to be healthy and the opportunity to make enough to support their families.

As the President of the General Assembly said yesterday, we must now demonstrate the collective political will to turn our promises into action.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Mr. Mario Pivaral, Vice-Minister of Planning and Programming of Guatemala.

Mr. Pivaral (Guatemala) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to thank the President of the General Assembly, Mr. Srgjan Kerim, for the invitation to participate in this important debate, a debate which will enable us to understand various positions on this subject and to have an exchange of experiences, which is always beneficial to expanding our vision.

At the outset, I would like to associate my delegation with the statement made by the representative of Antigua and Barbuda on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and with the statement to be made by the representative of Mexico on behalf of the Rio Group.

In the year 2000, the heads of State of the States Members of the United Nations made a commitment in the Millennium Declaration to achieving eight objectives now known as the Millennium Development

Goals (MDGs). Those objectives are fully compatible with the firm and lasting peace accords signed by the State of Guatemala in 1996. They also constitute a commitment between developed and developing countries to progress sustainably towards achieving the Goals by 2015.

The report of progress achieved towards the Millennium Development Goals in Guatemala, prepared by the Secretariat of Planning and Programming of the Presidency, concludes that our country can achieve most of the MDGs by 2015 if we are able to meet three basic and fundamental conditions. We must first accelerate the pace of inclusive economic growth — in other words, economic growth in sectors in which most of our population works in conditions of poverty, such as agriculture — and sustain it until 2015. Secondly, we must adopt complementary policies of income redistribution, and thirdly, we must invest in a series of highly coordinated social policies of proven effectiveness.

Poverty and inequality must not be approached in an isolated way by each actor or sector; rather, it is only through the coordinated execution of economic growth policies that generate employment in the poorest regions, and through highly effective and focused social policies for the most needy, that we will find a sustainable way out of the social, economic and political exclusion in which more than half of the Guatemalan population finds itself.

Our report is innovative because it takes into account the role that cultural diversity and gender differences play in achieving the Millennium Development Goals, evidencing the close relationship between reaching those Goals and overcoming cultural, ethnic and gender discrimination.

We have made important strides in education, health and the construction of institutions on which development depends. In education, we have achieved significant increases in the net rate of enrolment, while still facing the challenge of increasing scholarly achievement for children — in other words, ensuring that every child who starts elementary school finishes it successfully. In 2008, we have assigned 8 per cent more of the budget for investment in educational resources than we did in 2007. With respect to health goals, one of our biggest achievements is the reduction of infant mortality by 50 per cent.

However, 10 years after signing the peace accords, we still face serious challenges in consolidating the rule of law and deepening democracy, which is why we must now transform those indicators of health, education and mortality into processes of net poverty reduction, the biggest challenge faced by our country with respect to the MDGs. In 2008, we have an 18.7 per cent rate of extreme poverty, compared to 21.5 per cent in 2004.

Finally, the report confirms that the relevance of increased democratization at the international level — especially in the areas of access to decision-making in the many forums of international governance; effective access to free trade, especially in the area of agriculture; access to better public and external private financing; and access to new technologies — will facilitate the conjugation of countries' internal efforts with a genuine partnership with the principal developed economies.

In closing, I wish to share some of the political guidelines adopted by our Government within the framework of the peace accords of December 1996, some 80 days after it came to power, which will contribute comprehensively to the achievement of the MDGs. They include our Government plan for 2008-2012 and a longer-term development vision in our "Plan of Hope 2008-2032", which is a project for social and economic development that prioritizes social cohesion whereby productivity, solidarity, competitiveness and regionalization will be the pillars of the development implemented in 2008-2012.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Amina Ibrahim, Senior Special Assistant to the President of Nigeria.

Mrs. Ibrahim (Nigeria): My delegation commends your firm commitment, Sir, to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), as exemplified by the laudable and timely initiative of convening this thematic debate as we approach the half-way milestone to the target date of 2015, and more especially against the backdrop of widespread concern that sub-Saharan Africa is unlikely to achieve the MDGs on schedule.

We concur with the statements made by Ms. Joanne Massiah, Minister of State in the Ministry of Agriculture, Lands, Marine Resources and Agro Industry of Antigua and Barbuda, on behalf of Africa and the Group of 77 and China, and the statement to be

read out by the Permanent Representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo on behalf of Africa. We also wish to reflect further on the issue.

Nigeria remains firmly committed to the achievement of the MDGs and has effectively aligned them with its national economic empowerment development strategy of 2004. That policy framework encompasses macroeconomic policies and interventions that are directed at poverty reduction to benefit all segments of Nigerian society and to induce economic growth that invests in its people. The current Government of our President, Mr. Umaru Yar'Adua, has reinforced his commitment in our seven-point agenda for development that guides the next phase of our reform and the vision of Nigeria becoming one of the top 20 economies in the world by 2020.

As Nigeria strives to deliver on the MDGs, it is clear to us all that the eight Goals must be seen as interdependent and, as such, need to be implemented in a manner that mutually reinforces the whole development agenda.

Nigeria has recorded successes over the past seven years in growth rates of 6 per cent and the reduction of its overall poverty levels to 54.4 per cent, while seeing its enrolment rates in primary school soar to 84 per cent. The ratio of girls to boys in our basic education system has improved, and we have seen our women placed in key decision-making roles at the highest levels of our Government. Renewed efforts with our immunization programme have also seen decreases in our child mortality, and we have stopped and reversed the national trend of HIV/AIDS.

Nigeria, in 2005, took the bold step of utilizing the savings of $1 billion annually, made from the landmark Paris Club debt deal, and set that amount aside in a virtual poverty fund, which is dedicated to the sole expenditure of MDG projects and programmes that scale up investments in key related sectors. This has resulted in the employment of an additional 40,000 teachers for basic education and in the delivery of in-service training to 145,000 primary school teachers annually. This spending has also funded the gap for the eradication of the wild polio virus by the end of 2009. It has provided emergency obstetric care in 18 tertiary hospitals in our country and has increased the number of primary health-care centres. We have also invested in scaling up the provision of bednets, providing over half a million bednets last year and the year before, and of artemisinin-based combination therapies. It has also provided for antiretroviral therapies and the treatment of an additional 75,000 Nigerians.

We have also provided innovative means of access to microcredit for women and designed new programmes of conditional grants to our states that not only address the MDGs but encourage governance and accountability.

A social safety net initiative has also been launched, through a conditional cash transfer scheme. It targets the poorest of our marginalized groups: our widows, those with special needs, women with vesico-vaginal fistula and those living, and caring for others, with HIV/AIDS. That is just a snapshot of some of Nigeria's successes, which give us hope that we can get back on track and deliver the MDGs by 2015.

However, we are facing daunting challenges in achieving the Goals, especially those that address maternal health. Other challenges that are impeding our getting back on track include the need for effective intergovernmental collaboration among our three tiers of government, the availability of reliable data and statistics, institutional and human resource capacity, democracy and the rule of law, genuine partnership for development and ensuring that the gains of our macroeconomic growth actually have a real impact on the lives of our poor.

My delegation strongly feels that developing countries, particularly those in sub-Saharan Africa, would be in a better position to achieve all the MDGs if our development partners could fast-track implementing their part of the commitments made with respect to Goal 8. We therefore reiterate our earlier call for the international community to take concerted and time-bound action to ensure that all the commitments made by developed countries, addressing, in particular, trade, debt and aid effectiveness, are adhered to.

In this respect, we believe that there is a unique opportunity for the MDG Africa Steering Group, chaired by the Secretary-General, to give to the September high-level meeting a concrete timetable for meeting the commitments of the Group of Eight and others by 2010. That would go a long way to demonstrating the credibility of that important initiative by the Secretary-General. Africa and Nigeria, for their part, have already demonstrated their commitment by the current efforts that have been taken

and by those that are being proposed for between now and 2015.

Finally, let us talk less about the global compact and act to deliver concrete results that our poorest can touch and feel, so that the MDGs become a reality and not another broken promise.

The Acting President: As members are aware, there are still some 100 speakers inscribed on the list for this thematic debate. In this connection, it will be necessary to hold an additional plenary meeting this evening, from 6 to 9 p.m. I would like once again to appeal to speakers to limit their statements to five minutes so that we can exhaust the list of speakers at a reasonable hour tomorrow. I hope that I can count on the cooperation of representatives to keep to this time limit.

I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Alexis Bizimungu, Chef de Cabinet of the Vice-Ministry of Planning of Burundi.

Mr. Bizimungu (Burundi) (*spoke in French*): It is a great pleasure for me to speak on behalf of the delegation of Burundi to share the efforts made by the Government of my country towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015. I would like at the outset to stress that Burundi aligns itself with the statement made by the representative of Antigua and Barbuda on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. We support the recommendations contained in that statement. My delegation also aligns itself with the statement made by the representative of Bangladesh on behalf of the least developed countries and the statement to be made by the representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo on behalf of the Group of African States.

Burundi is recovering from a long socio-economic crisis that has lasted for more than a decade and has caused serious harm in the social, economic and security spheres. Despite the numerous obstacles, the Burundi authorities have, since September 2002, truly committed themselves to achieving reforms and measures aimed at achieving the MDGs. In order to meet our commitments, we have sought to integrate MDG commitments into our economic planning cycle. Hence, the Government's five-year programme for 2005-2010, the Strategic Framework for Peacebuilding and the Poverty Reduction Strategic Paper and the Priority Action Programme are pillars for achieving the MDGs.

As in most sub-Saharan developing countries, progress towards achieving the MDG targets has been rather slow and modest in Burundi. I would like to describe some of the efforts made by the Government of Burundi towards achieving each of the eight Goals as well as the measures that have been taken to achieve them.

With regard to Goal 1, the reduction of extreme poverty and hunger, Burundi will register a delay in its accomplishment. In fact, the poverty index, which was 34.8 per cent in 1990, is now estimated at 68 per cent. The rate of investment went from 16.6 per cent of gross domestic product in 1993 to less than 8 per cent in 2002. In 2006, this rate increased slightly, reaching 11.6 per cent of gross domestic product. However, it continues to be very low compared with the high rate that is required.

With regard to promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women, Burundi, although far from reaching parity, can be proud of considerable improvement. Indeed, our constitution sets a quota of 30 per cent for women in our institutions, and this has been respected in the allocation of parliamentary seats and Government posts. Similarly, the number of women occupying high civil service posts has increased in a positive manner. Further, to facilitate access to credit by women, who represent a major part of the disadvantaged population, and to improve their conditions of life, the Government has established a fund for promoting microprojects, particularly those initiated by women.

In terms of education, the net rate of school enrolment, which was 42 per cent in 1996, has increased considerably: it improved by around 81 per cent in 2006 and by about 101 per cent in 2007, thanks to the normalization of the security situation in much of the national territory, and particularly thanks to the presidential measure to ensure free primary education. However, in order to achieve the objective of universal schooling, we must continue to increase the rate of access, improve the rate of student retention and promote awareness among parents. Indeed, only 37 per cent of children who go to school finish primary schooling. Despite the absence of any discrimination, girls continue to be left behind. That is mainly due to parents who are not fully aware of the benefits of education. We also see too many students repeating the school year and high drop-out rates.

In terms of health, the situation of children under five years of age is of great concern. Indeed, because of deteriorating sanitation infrastructure, the lack of medical staff and the remoteness of certain areas of the country, the chances for the success of and follow-up to national immunization campaigns are largely compromised. Despite the efforts of the Government, such as the provision of free health care for children under five years old, the country is unlikely to meet its immunization goals unless it obtains significant support from its development partners.

With regard to HIV/AIDS, the pandemic continues to be an obstacle to the development efforts made by the Government of Burundi. On the basis of the trends thus far, we can predict a national HIV/AIDS rate of 10 to 11 per cent. In order to manage the HIV/AIDS problem at the institutional level, a department has been set up to deal with this issue. At the operational level, the various care programmes and national awareness policies do not yet ensure full access for people who are affected, despite the efforts that have been made both nationally and internationally.

With regard to clean drinking water, various public investment programmes have had to slow down because of the crisis, whereas before 1993 the proportion of the population with access to clean drinking water on a sustainable basis had increased considerably. It is therefore unlikely that this particular objective will be achieved by 2015.

In the area of the environment, the degradation of our natural ecosystems has revealed itself in the lack of protection for biodiversity and the progressive loss of forest cover. The Government is undertaking efforts to plant as many trees as possible in order to create better environmental conditions.

In terms of commerce and foreign trade, Burundi continues to suffer from deteriorating terms of trade. The resources generated by transactions with the rest of the world are still inadequate for us to meet the priority needs of the population as a whole and, in particular, those who are affected by the crisis.

In terms of the global partnership for development, the success at the Paris Club in March 2004 gave a new lease on life to Burundi's economy. Burundi welcomed the announcements made at the round table by partners in May 2007, and we would like to take this opportunity to thank our partners, in particular those partners who have already disbursed the funds promised at that round table. We also take this opportunity to make an appeal to those who have not yet done so to meet their commitments.

Given the current situation and if today's trends persist, unless the international community continues to provide financial support to Burundi, including the forgiveness of all its debt, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) will not be achieved by 2015 and could even be undermined.

Before closing, given the poor performance achieved by a number of countries in regard to the MDGs, the delegation of Burundi would like to submit to the international community the following recommendations.

First, world leaders should reaffirm their commitment to do everything possible to achieve the MDGs by 2015. Secondly, it is important to go beyond mere statements of intention and to make determined and rigorous efforts to reverse current trends. Thus, an appropriate solution should be found for the basic problem of financing for development, including by respecting commitments that were made at international conferences, in particular the Monterrey Consensus. Thirdly, it is important to support developing countries in their efforts aimed at developing the agricultural sector and promoting a reduction in poverty. Fourthly, it is important to mobilize the necessary resources to finance capacity-building in developing countries in priority sectors while respecting the principle of national ownership. Fifthly and finally, the international financial institutions must step up their efforts to establish an integrated strategy for financing for development for countries in special circumstances, such as the least developed countries and countries in post-conflict situations.

Mr. Heller (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): It is an honour for me to address the Assembly on behalf of the member States of the Rio Group.

The member States of the Rio Group have made considerable efforts in recent years to promote the economic growth of their societies and achieve a favourable environment for development. Such efforts have brought about important results in the area of poverty reduction and the improvement of important indicators, such as the human development index.

On this occasion, we reiterate our determination and commitment to fight urgently against the severe problems of poverty, social exclusion and inequality, which affect, in varying measure, the nations of the hemisphere, to confront their root causes and their consequences and to create favourable conditions for equitable socio-economic development in order to promote fairer societies. In that regard, the countries of the region have been working on the establishment of joint mechanisms for the firm and consistent implementation of measures to decrease levels of poverty and increase access, by the entirety of our societies to essential public services, such as education and health, so as to guarantee that every individual is capable of reaching his or her full potential, regardless of social origin. In addition, it is important to make progress on gender equity, bearing in mind the multiplier effect of policies that favour the advancement of women.

The Millennium Development Goals provide us with useful guidelines for establishing the minimum standards that our societies must meet. The year 2015 is our deadline. Without hesitation, we, the member countries of the Rio Group, reaffirm our commitment to those Goals. We also encourage all other members of the international community to do the same.

The countries of the Rio Group recognize that reaching the Millennium Development Goals, and in general achieving the sustainable development of our societies, is a complex process involving national and international elements. That process is supported by a broad and genuine commitment to solidarity by the Governments of the world, which of necessity entails effective and efficient international cooperation to finance the achievement of those Goals.

In that regard, we recall that the Monterrey Consensus of the International Conference on Financing for Development, because of its holistic approach and the call for consistency between all public policies and private sector efforts that have an impact on development, constitutes an important contribution to understanding and collective advancement towards fulfilment of the Millennium Development Goals. We consider that both this thematic debate and the Doha Conference constitute privileged moments for the international community to review what has been achieved; to recognize the long path remaining to be travelled; and, above all, to commit decisively to undertaking the necessary actions to meet those Goals.

It is clear and alarming that, at the current rate of progress, many countries will not be able to meet the Millennium Development Goals by 2015. There is no doubt about this, and, moreover, it has been demonstrated irrefutably in the most recent reports and surveys on the matter.

In this context, the countries of the Rio Group reaffirm that development constitutes a shared responsibility, and that it is indispensable for all countries to fulfil their commitments in the area of international cooperation. It is particularly necessary that all developed countries reach the goal of setting aside 0.7 per cent of their gross national product for official development assistance.

Likewise, we must ensure that development efforts are coordinated and as effective as possible. Accordingly, the countries of the Rio Group believe in the usefulness of the principles contained in the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and the importance of promoting them.

In addition, we must bear in mind the diverse situations faced by the countries of the so-called South and keep a balanced perspective that guarantees that all those that need it can count on the multilateral and bilateral support of the international community to achieve their development goals.

We wish in particular to call for continued support and adequate attention to middle-income countries and their specific needs, keeping in mind that, according to the estimates of this Organization itself, more than 40 per cent of the people subsisting on less than two dollars per day reside in those countries.

Similarly, the Rio Group reaffirms the usefulness of continuing the search for innovative financing mechanisms as an effective tool for reaching the Millennium Development Goals and for joining efforts between countries at different stages of development in the fight against hunger and poverty, without prejudice to the traditional mechanisms and commitments relevant to that fight.

On behalf of the Rio Group, I wish to state that the United Nations, as the multilateral forum par excellence, and because of its decades of experience of fostering and supporting development, is in a strategic position to undertake this reflection and become a

guarantor for the fulfilment of our commitments. May it rest assured of our wholehearted support to progress in that direction.

Mr. Lidén (Sweden): Allow me to say first that I associate myself with the statement made earlier by the representative of Slovenia on behalf of the European Union. On this occasion, I am honoured to speak on behalf of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden.

The five Nordic countries join their voices in this statement to stress a key message: the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), cannot be achieved without a broader enjoyment of sexual and reproductive health and rights.

We are convinced that healthy women with the freedom to participate fully in society are a prerequisite for any country to achieve its full potential for sustainable economic and social development; that the ability of women to control their own fertility and their access to reproductive health services is necessary to significantly reduce maternal and child mortality rates; that access for young men and women to contraceptives, comprehensive sex education and confidential reproductive health services is crucial in reducing adolescent birth rates; that sexual and reproductive health education and access to reproductive health services are the best guarantees for the prevention of HIV/AIDS; and that every person's access to sexual and reproductive health and rights is fundamental for achieving gender equality.

We have a long way to go, however. It is estimated that 70 per cent of the 1.3 billion people living in absolute poverty are women and girls; that two thirds of the world's work is carried out by women and girls for less than 5 per cent of the total income; that each year there are over 500,000 maternal deaths — one woman dying every minute from complications during pregnancy or childbirth — and more than 90 per cent of those deaths occur in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia; that one quarter to one half of girls in developing countries become mothers before age 18; and that 60 per cent of HIV-positive adults in sub-Saharan Africa are women, and 75 per cent of newly infected youth are girls and young women aged 15 to 24.

Therefore, the Nordic countries have put sexual and reproductive health and rights at the centre of our international development cooperation. We encourage all partners to do the same, and we expect the United Nations to be a leader in these efforts.

We welcome the fact that the General Assembly has included universal access to reproductive health by 2015 as a target in the MDGs. That target is a clear signal to all of us to step up our support to programmes promoting sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Mr. Pfanzelter (Austria): Austria is very grateful to the President of the General Assembly for convening this debate on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). As we have seen in the statements made thus far, we all agree that some progress has been made since 2000. But we also agree that a lot remains to be done.

The question is therefore: how will we reach the MDGs by 2015? Austria, for its part, is strongly committed to the official development assistance targets and to the principles of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness. We will spare no efforts over the coming years to fully live up to those commitments by raising the quantity as well as the quality of aid. We are especially committed to helping those that need it most: the least developed countries and Africa.

The eradication of poverty is the key target of the MDGs and has always been the most important issue of international development cooperation. Poverty is not just a question of income. It is a complex phenomenon with many dimensions, comprising, inter alia, exclusion from the elementary human rights to food, education and health. Poverty often means living without security, being exposed to diseases, natural disasters and violence. Poor people find themselves at the margins of society, frequently deprived of their independence and their right to self-determination.

Determined pro-poor policies, national strategies for poverty reduction and political participation are important elements for reducing poverty. It is imperative that women fully participate in the political and economic decision-making process. When people have hope and a perspective of meaningful participation in political life, when they do not feel discriminated against or excluded from education and job markets, they will not take up arms. The combination of poverty and violence represents a formidable obstacle for achieving poverty alleviation and the MDGs in general.

Unfortunately, the very substantial challenge of the eradication of poverty is exacerbated by the all-pervasive phenomenon of climate change. Many of the root causes of poverty are closely linked to environmental phenomena. Our efforts to fight climate change are therefore central to the fight against poverty and the attainment of sustainable development.

Even though the negative effects of climate change are a growing concern for all of us, some countries are particularly affected. While Austrian glaciers are melting, small islands are confronted with rising sea levels, floods, hurricanes and other weather phenomena. Other regions are facing drought, land degradation and desertification. It is imperative that we help those countries most affected by climate change to adapt to its effects. If we do not, the attainment of the MDGs will remain no more than a dream. We also need to intensify international cooperation on energy issues. Sustainable energy systems are a prerequisite for the attainment of the MDGs and for stabilizing the global climate.

Only those who help quickly help effectively. We must support those most vulnerable — such as small island States — to adapt to climate change, while at the same time stepping up our efforts to mitigate the causes of climate change. It is my firm conviction that a successful implementation of the MDGs is not possible without progress in that field.

Finally, our eighth Millennium pledge was that we would develop a global partnership for development. We have come some way towards realizing that Goal. But the test of our claim will be progress in the effective implementation of the remaining seven MDGs.

The Acting President: We have heard the last speaker in the thematic debate for this meeting. We shall hear the remaining speakers this afternoon at 3 p.m.

The meeting was adjourned at 1.25 p.m.